

BLACK HISTORY

The Portland Observer

Black Creativity Triumphs Against The ODDS

Portrait of Visual Artists of the Harlem Renaissance Premieres February 16 on PBS

The period of the 1920s and '30s known as the Harlem Renaissance encompassed an extraordinary outburst of creativity by African-American visual artists. Racial prejudice and segregation, however, not only kept them out of mainstream museums and galleries where they could show and sell their art, but threatened the very core of their personal artistic expression.

The little-known story of this daring group of visual artists is told in *Against The ODDS: The Artists Of The Harlem Renaissance*, a one-hour documentary produced and directed by Amber Edwards, premiering Wednesday, February 16 at 10 p.m. ET on PBS. (Check Local Listings) Creating a colorful mosaic of art and history, the program combines the stunning, original works of dozens of visual artists of the era; rare archival footage of the artists at home, in their studios, and at exhibitions; first-person accounts by three surviving artists—Lois Mailou Jones, James Wells, and Allan Crite; and interviews with authors Arnold Rampersad (*The Life of Langston Hughes*), Arthur Ashe's *Days of Grace* and David Levering Lewis (*When Harlem Was In Vogue*), W.E.B. DuBois: *The Biography of a Race*), as well as art historians and curators. The documentary is narrated by actor Joe Morton.

Against The ODDS was inspired by an exhibition at The Newark Museum in Newark, New Jersey, that brought together, for

the first time in over half a century, more than 130 paintings, prints, photographs, and sculptures by black artists who worked under the auspices of the William E. Harmon Foundation.

This philanthropy, founded by the inventor of the suburban subdivision, served as an unlikely, but remarkable open door for Harlem Renaissance artists. Through its series of annual "Exhibitions of Negro Art," The Harmon Foundation provided black artists with both a showcase and a market place, and soon became the dominant force in African-American art. By the mid-1930s, however, the Harlem Renaissance had run out of steam, and the Harmon Foundation got out of the art business, leaving the artists largely forgotten until the recent Newark Museum showing.

From the wildly diverse works that black artists painted, drew, sculpted, and photographed, to the negative stereotypes that civil rights leaders fought to change with positive propaganda, *Against The Odds* offers a compelling history of African-American images. Among the artists whose works are featured are Elizabeth Prophet, William Henry Johnson, Augusta Savage, Aaron Douglas, Laura Wheeler Waring, Sargent Johnson, Palmer Hayden, Hale Woodruff, Richmond Barthe, and Archibald Motley.

Placing these and other artists' works in the context of the complex world that shaped it, *Against The Odds* raises fasci-

nating issues that are still hotly debated today: Is there an identifiable "black" art? Should artists of color be expected to express racial identity in their art? What happens when artists become political message bearers? When does a generous patron become a benevolent censor? And what kind of compromises do artists make to adapt to the marketplace?

Ultimately, *Against The Odds* is a story of triumph—a celebration of the power of personal expression to overcome prejudice and discrimination. "You don't have to be black to be blessed by black creativity," historian Clement Price concludes at the end of the program. "All Americans are blessed—that this country, despite itself, was able to produce these artists."



The Artists Of The Harlem Renaissance, a one-hour documentary by Amber Edwards premiering Wednesday, February 16 at 10 p.m. ET on PBS's stations nationwide (check local listings), tells the little-known story of a group of African-American visual artists fighting racial prejudice and discrimination during a vibrant period of creativity in the 1920s and '30s. Narrated by actor Joe Morton, the documentary combines more than a hundred stunning, original works of art from that era; rare archival footage of the artists and their world; first-person accounts by three surviving artists; and interviews with authors, art historians, and curators, to create a colorful mosaic of black art and history. Top left: Sculptor Augusta Savage (1892-1962) started her own school for aspiring artists in Harlem, but ended her career in seclusion and despair. Top right: Sculptor Sargent Claude Johnson (1887-1967) was widely admired for his dignified portrayal of black subjects. Bottom left: William Henry Johnson (1901-1970) was critically acclaimed but died in poverty nonetheless; more than a thousand of his paintings were donated to the national Museum of American Art Washington, DC, by the William E. Harmon Foundation, his primary patron. (Photos: Courtesy of the National Archives.)

February Is Black History Month

Celebrate Black History Month Throughout February At PCC

All events are free and open to everyone!

Sojourner Truth Theater

A lively, dramatized presentation of the life of Sojourner Truth. At noon both days.

Feb. 7, Sylvania
ST. Bldg. A 1

Feb. 22, Cascade
Terrell Hall 122

Rap Forum

Three local RAP musicians will perform lyrics and share ideas about the effects of RAP music on our culture. At noon both days.

Feb. 11, Sylvania
ST. Bldg. Room A1

Feb. 10, Rock Creek
Town Hall, Bldg. 2

The African-American Roots Of The Statue Of Liberty

The surprising but true story of how ancient Egyptian monuments inspired the sculptor who built America's landmark statue. At noon. Feb. 12 + 13, Cascade Campus Gym, Sat: 10a-6p; Sun: 11a-4p.

Forging a Legacy of Activism

Black Women In The Anti-Slavery Movement from 1828 to 1860

A lecture on Black women abolitionists by Shirley Yee, Women's Studies professor at Univ. of Washington. Feb. 17, Sylvania, 2 p.m. in ST Bldg., Room A1.

Gospel Explosion

Feb. 19, Vancouver Ave. Baptist Church, 7 p.m.

A Black Family History: The Impact of People of African Descent Around the World

Feb. 24, Cascade, Terrell Hall 122, 12 noon.

Call 244-6111, ext. 4360 for a brochure giving full details.



Come Join Us!

Portland Community College

Cascade Campus
705 N. Killingsworth St.

Rock Creek Campus
17705 N.W. Springville Rd.

Sylvania Campus
12000 S.W. 49th Ave.

Traffic Management Bureau Honors African-American Contributions To Transportation

In honor of February's Black History Month, Portland's Bureau of Traffic management warmly salutes the many contributions of African-Americans to our transportation industry. African-Americans' role in the development of America's transportation system has been substantial, impressive and productive. The role of African-Americans in the development and industrialization of

Jan Ernst Matzelinger



Jan Ernst Matzelinger (1852-1889)

this country has been denied, distorted, neglected or just plain unrecorded. The following are a few of the significant contributions of African-Americans to transportation in our country, many which play an important part in moving goods and people today.

GARRETT MORGAN

Garrett Morgan invented the three-way traffic signal in 1923. Prior to Morgan's invention, traffic signals had to be hand-changed from "stop" to "go." Earlier, Morgan's gas mask invention was ignored until 1916 when he rushed to the site of a tunnel explosion and used his gas mask to save the lives of over twenty trapped workers. (Morgan was awarded a gold medal by the city of Cleveland for his heroism.)

JAN ERNST MATZELINGER

Jan Matzelinger invented the Lasting machine that revolutionized shoe manufacturing in 1897 in Lynn, Massachusetts. His machine mechanically attached soles to the bottom of shoes, replacing the painstaking hand process. Matzelinger's invention resulted in Lynn, Massachusetts, becoming the world's largest shoe manufacturing center.

BENJAMIN BANNEKER

With the equivalent of an eighth grade education, several borrowed books, and a pocket watch, Benjamin Banneker taught himself the basics of astronomy, weather, mechanics and farming, named by President George Washington to a three-man team of surveyors and architects to design the

Garrett Morgan



Garrett Morgan (1877-1963)

new capital, Banneker became the first black presidential appointee. According to some historians, after Charles L'Enfant, the head of the capital city design team resigned and returned to Paris, Banneker reproduced the plans from memory in two days.

BILLIE JOE BECOATS

Billie Joe Becoats invented the "two-wheel drive" bike in 1992 which provides superior traction and handling on slippery surfaces, snow and rough terrain. When the Schwinn bicycle company was not interested in his invention, Becoats went on to establish a successful company that sells the bikes in over two dozen countries throughout the world.

Fifth Annual Afro-American Life And History Essay Contest

For Undergraduate And Graduate Students

The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History with a grant from the Ford Foundation announces its fifth annual Essay contest for undergraduate and graduate students.

The purpose of this contest is to encourage student research and writing on African American life, history, and culture and to generate more advanced study.

Any undergraduate student and graduate student in the first two years of master's degree or doctoral study may qualify for the contest.

Three winners at the undergraduate level and three winners at the graduate level will be recognized.

Winners will be awarded \$500 cash prizes and invited to the ASALH Annual Meeting in October 1994. Faculty sponsors will also be invited to attend. ASALH will pay the expenses of the winners and their faculty sponsors. Special sessions will be organized and their faculty sponsors



Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded ASALH in 1915 and initiated Negro History Week in 1926 (which was expanded to Black History Month in 1976)

will be awarded certificates of merit. Essays may be submitted on any

topic that explores the life, history, and culture of African-Americans. Essays should have appropriate documentation and conform in style to articles published in the *Journal of Negro History*.

Essays will be evaluated on the basis of cogency, content, documentation, organization, originality, and style. A removable front page to make judging anonymous must give the title of the essay and a brief abstract. The cover sheet with the names of the student and sponsor must include both the school year and the summer addresses and telephone numbers of both the contestant and the faculty sponsor.

Entries must also include a letter of endorsement from the faculty sponsor, clearly indicating the student's year in school and career goals.

To be eligible, entries must be addressed to ASALH Essay Contest, 1407 14th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.